United Nations CEDAW/C/ERI/CO/5/Add.1

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
6 March 2018
English
Original: English, French and Spanish only

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Eritrea

Addendum

Information provided by Eritrea in follow-up to the concluding observations*

[Date received: 23 February 2018]

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

18-03452 (E) 130318

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I. Preamble

1. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, henceforth the committee, considered the 4th and 5th periodic reports of Eritrea (CEDAW/C/ERI/4) and (CEDAW/C/ERI/5) at its 1291st and 1292nd meetings. (Refer CEDAW/C/SR1291 & 1292).

2. The Government of the State of Eritrea, henceforth the Government, commends the committee for its prompt follow up and requests for additional elaborations on several issues as well as its availability for a constructive engagement with the Eritrean delegation on 26 February 2015, in Geneva (as attached). As part of its obligation to the Convention, the Government has submitted its responses and statistical data on the issues raised. This is an effort that should be recognized and valued.

3. The concluding observations, adopted by the committee at its sixtieth session (16 Feb–6 March 2015) welcomed the progress achieved since the consideration in 2006 of the State party's combined initial, second and third reports (CEDAW/C/ERI/CO/3). It particularly underlined the following aspects:

- The legislative reforms and the adoption of Proclamation No.158/2007 on the Abolition of Female Circumcision in 2007 in particular;
- Ratifications of the Convention against Torture and other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment of Punishment, in 2014, the Convention against transnational organized crime and its protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, in 2014.[1]

4. Since its ratification in 1995, the Government has demonstrated full commitment to the effective implementation of CEDAW. In this regard, tangible progress has been registered in the last two decades in the promotion women equality and empowerment in the economic, social and political spheres. This is driven by the pragmatic policies and strategies, coupled with the political will and commitment of the government and its people for social justice and human dignity. The Eritrean struggle for independence was also driven by these ideals and Eritrea is a nation that emanated from the struggle for human rights.

5. The main factors and challenges that influence the broader implementation of CEDAW in Eritrea are the existential external threats. These include the 1998 2000 Ethiopia's war of aggression and the continued occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories by Ethiopia in defiance to the international court ruling, the unjust and unwarranted UN Security Council Resolutions of 2009 and 2011 imposed on Eritrea and the futile attempts of "regime change" to overthrow the Eritrean Government. In spite of these challenges, however, the strong political will, commitment and actions of the government to promote women's rights and the resilience of Eritrean women and the community at large, has sustained the progress.

6. In this regard, reporting obligations and additional submissions requested have been fulfilled. The observations made by the committee were already addressed in the 4th and 5th periodic reports of Eritrea. Detailed information was also presented during the oral submission and the subsequent constructive engagements. Furthermore, the Eritrean delegation submitted a written response on March 6, 2015 (within forty-eight

[1] CEDAW/C/ERI/CO/5.

hours) which also dealt on the factual errors in the observations for serious considerations by the committee.

7. Empowering women's status as well as ensuring their legal position is a process inherently integrated in the overall socio-economic development efforts and the attendant cultural transformations in the society. Due importance has also been given to the policy of affirmative action to promote women's equality. The most significant factor in this endeavour has been and still is the existing political will and readiness of the Government and its people towards achieving women's rights and equality. This is as an integral element of building a strong nation and a viable future.

8. It is in the above context that this follow up on the concluding observations is presented highlighting several issues. This pertains to the Steps undertaken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 9(b), and 25(a), (c) and (e). The rest of the issues raised as per the observation made shall be addressed in the upcoming 6th periodic report.

II. Follow up on the concluding observations

Para 9 (b) on the National Service

9. The Defamatory statements of sexual abuse in the Sawa Education and Training Center have been refuted by repeated explanations. As a well-established institution, the center upholds standard reporting and monitoring mechanisms in protecting the dignity of female participants during training, education as well as when they are in national service and national defence duties. The allegations are thus unfounded. It must also be noted that sexual violence is not condoned in the Eritrean culture. If and when sexual violence and rape occurs, appropriate punitive measures are taken by the relevant institutions; especially the courts. The committee is thus requested to acknowledge and respect the exemplary participation of young girls in the national service.

10. Eritrea's nation building is in essence building a youth generation and their empowerment is a priority of the Government. Eritrea has a pro-youth policy mainstreamed in all sectors, policies and programmes. While the family's role as a social institution is considerable, a multi-faceted approach comprising integrated systems, namely, the national education system, the nation-wide youth summer work community programme and the national service have been established towards this end.

11. In times of peace, National Service members do not have any other obligations once they finish their military training and fulfil their duty of service. But they are in theory part of the reserve army eligible for recall if and when war breaks out. The national service as a system and its Sawa Training Center are mainly developed as architecture for prompting youth preparedness and contribution in national development. But it also emerged against the backdrop of massive demobilization of the liberation struggle army and the vigorous efforts for a robust framework of regional security and development cooperation. Hence, National Service in some ways was essentially seen as a contingent security architecture which would allow the young nation to maintain a very small regular army with the latitude to mobilize the necessary force if and when it is faced with existential threats.

12. In the last 15 years in particular, the Center has completely transformed itself into an Education and Training center. With the revision of the 11-year curriculum in

2003 in particular, 12th Grade schooling for all high school students started to take place at the "Warsay-Yikealo" High School established within the center and administered by the Ministry of Education. Students from all over the country participate in the Secondary School Leaving Examination in the center while 3 months are slotted for military training. Those who get a passing mark are enrolled for certificate, diploma and degree programmes in the higher learning institutions. A technical and vocational school has been established and caters a 2-year technical and vocational training programme and so far for more than 20,000 have graduated at certificate level in the last 10 years. Those who do not get passing marks are also enrolled in other vocational centers. The effort is part of the comprehensive effort to avoid wastage in the human resource development of the nation.

13. This demonstrates the center's importance as a vehicle for youth upbringing, cultural transformation and human resource development. Indeed, as stipulated in Proclamation No. 82/1995 on National Service, the center and its programme has ensured a broader participation and reliable preparedness of young girls in nation building and has contributed to their equality and empowerment. It is also a ground breaking measure that sustains equal right and opportunities in the military, police and security forces. It is to be recalled that Eritrean women have played a decisive role and sacrifice as gallant fighters in the struggle for independence. The young female generation today is also following suit of this heroic role played by their predecessor which was the foundation of the equality of men and women in Eritrea.

14. During the first semester break each year, a family visit program[2] for parents, siblings and members of extended family of the Sawa students, is organized by the Ministry of Education to actually witness the situation and the progress made by the participants. This is indeed an opportunity, where parents inter-act with the students, teachers and the management of the center and open, constructive and critical engagement and discussion is done on the overall situation.

15. In normal times, the National Service is limited to 18 months by law; 12 months of which are generally spent on civilian/public works assignments. This is affected today due to Ethiopia's continued occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories in defiance of international law, international ruling made by the International Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission, its pronounced plans of destabilization against the country as well as the unjust sanctions imposed on Eritrea. Eritrea has been forced to prolong the duration of the National Service from its statutory 18 months to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. In the absence of appropriate measures by the UN Security Council against Ethiopia, Eritrea has no option but to take necessary measures of self-defense that are proportionate to the threat it faces.

Para 25 (a) on free and fair elections

16. As a historical fact, it will be helpful to note that the first Eritrean constitution was formulated by the United Nation in August 1952 when Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia contrary to the will of the people for independence. Article 20 of the constitution stipulates astonishingly states that eligible person to elect and be elected is a male above 21 years, thereby discriminating women from enjoying their political and civil rights. This was reversed during the National Liberation Struggle for independence when the right of women to elect and be elected was ensured.

[2] Annual program Organized by the Ministry of education.

17. After independence, the right of Eritrean women to freely cast their vote and stand for election and to hold public office has been sanctioned by national laws. Elections in Eritrea are free and fair in accordance to the legally established process and procedures. Elections conducted at village, sub-region and regional levels are monitored by election committees composed of both men and women and are effectively accomplished ensuring women's greater participation.

Para 25 (c) on temporary special measures

18. Affirmative action is a government policy stipulated in all legal and institutional framework of the State including in the National Charter and the 1994 Macro Policy. This is a transitional measure aimed to close the prevailing gender disparity in all aspects of development including in political and administrative representation Proclamation No.86/1996 also stipulates that 30% of seats in all elections are reserved for women. Moreover, at least one seat in all administrative committees at village and locality levels, community courts, land distributing committees, various local development project committees (such as on water management, village electrification, health and sanitation., agricultural advancement, etc.) is reserved for women. Women's participation in public and political life in the elected and appointed positions including in the judiciary is henceforth showing progress.

19. Development programs and projects are also designed with the full participation of women and through the proper mainstreaming of women's empowerment. To encourage and ensure girl's participation at higher education lower entrance requirements for girls have been introduced in the prevailing situation.

Para 25 (e) on Security Council resolution No. 1325 (2000)

20. Eritrea has been part of the international and regional forums that started the process of this initiative, the Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace (1993), the African Platform for Action, Dakar (1994), and The Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing (1995). The Eritrean delegation was also part of the "Women, peace and conflict resolution "and continues to follow and implement the Beijing platform of Action. Furthermore, Eritrea delegation led by the Minister of Justice also demonstrated its commitment to non-violent means of conflict resolution during the Pan African Women's Conference on a Culture of Peace, Zanzibar, held on 17-20 May 1999.

21. Hence, the Security Council resolution (S/RES/1325) on women and peace and security adopted on 31 October 2000 is seen as a continuation of the above proceeding forums. The Government reiterates its commitment to collaborate with the United Nations interagency network on women equality to promote and strengthen the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts.

III. Conclusion

22. The Government of the State of Eritrea avails itself of this opportunity to once again reaffirm its commitment to the systemic and full implementation of CEDAW provisions with the clear vision on the advancement of women's rights and empowerment in Eritrea.